



MODULE 2: HAVES & HAVE NOTS



LESSON ONE IMPACT & ENTITLEMENT



LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore how famine impacts different communities in different ways and students will understand how different societies have been impacted as a result. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Greek Famine (1941-44)**
- » **The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)**
- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**
- » **The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)**



LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Understand that famine can impact differently on different people and communities in the same country or region.
- ✓ Identify reasons why some communities may be more affected than others.



LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Describe how different communities might have experienced famine and with different levels of severity.
- ✓ Understand how famine can impact differently at an individual as well as a community level.



Remembering Kostia, who died in the Ukrainian Holodomor
Image Credit: Heritages of Hunger Repository - Image Credit 1



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- > [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- > [Image of a blind woman from Spanish famine](#)
- > [Woman and children during Dutch hunger winter image](#)
- > [Image from Dutch hunger winter](#)
- > [Documentary on the Leningrad Blockade](#)
- > [Ukrainian song focused on the experience of children](#)
- > [Video on the Spanish war](#)



INTRODUCTION

Famine is often thought to affect all people equally, with the notion being that if there is a shortage of food then everyone will surely find it difficult to access it, but this is rarely the case.

Famine is often not caused by an absolute lack of food in a particular place, but by a lack of access to food. There may be food available in that place, but not everyone has the means or opportunity to obtain it.

Very often, the lack of access to food is most acutely felt by the most vulnerable in the affected society. Those who are poorest, those who belong to minorities, and those lacking voice and representation, tend to be the most harmed by famine.

In this way the 'Haves' - those that have money, resources and/or influence, tend to be much less impacted by famine than the 'Have Nots' - those who do not have money, resources and/or influence.



DISCUSSION POINT

Why might the poor, minorities, and those lacking representation be the most severely impacted by famine?



WHY ARE DIFFERENT PEOPLE AFFECTED DIFFERENTLY?

There can be a number of reasons why famine might affect different people in different ways, and why the 'Have Nots' in a society might be affected more severely than the 'Haves'.



MONEY

When any goods or materials are in short supply, their price tends to go up. In times of famine, food can become very expensive and unaffordable to many people. Sometimes a shadow economy, or 'black market' for the illegal trading of food, may develop to provide unofficial access to food. In both cases, only those with sufficient resources are able to access sufficient food.

POWER



In a time of food scarcity, whatever food is actually available is very often controlled by the Government and the elites in a society. If you are not part of these groups, or favoured by them, you are very likely to find access to food much harder to secure.

If you are considered an opponent of the Government then food may be deliberately kept from you in favour of those others that are considered loyal.



CASE STUDY

THE GREEK FAMINE (1941-44)



German soldiers
in a shop
- Image Credit 2

The Greek Famine of 1941-44 is an example of this. As a result of the German-led occupation of Greece in the War, with the support of Bulgaria and Italy, the country was effectively stripped of its own food and resources by the occupying forces, who sought to feed their own armies and people with Greek supplies. The country was divided into three zones between which no movements of people and goods was allowed. With the Allied Countries imposing a blockade on the country, now that it was under German control and regarded as enemy territory, a famine followed that claimed an estimated 300,000 lives.



The famine was characterised by the emergence of a significant shadow economy, where food and goods were traded illegally and at hugely inflated prices – making sure that only the wealthiest could afford them and leading to a strong public backlash against the abuse of a terrible situation for making profit.

Violetta Hionidou: Black Market, Hyperinflation, and Hunger



CASE STUDY

THE UKRAINIAN HOLODOMOR (1932-33)

A soldier
guarding grain
in the Ukrainian
Holodomor
- Image Credit 3



The Ukrainian Famine (Holodomor) of 1932-33 is a key example of how this can happen. The Holodomor claimed almost four million lives in Ukraine and was triggered by the Soviet Government trying to replace individually owned farms in Ukraine with collectively owned State farms. The Ukrainian farmers resisted the Soviet model and were driven from their land for not complying, and much of the grain that they did produce was confiscated and used to feed Soviets outside of Ukraine.

The Soviet Government controlled the supply of food and chose to prevent many Ukrainians from accessing it because they refused to comply, leading ultimately to mass starvation that left almost 13% of the Ukrainian population dead.





GEOGRAPHY

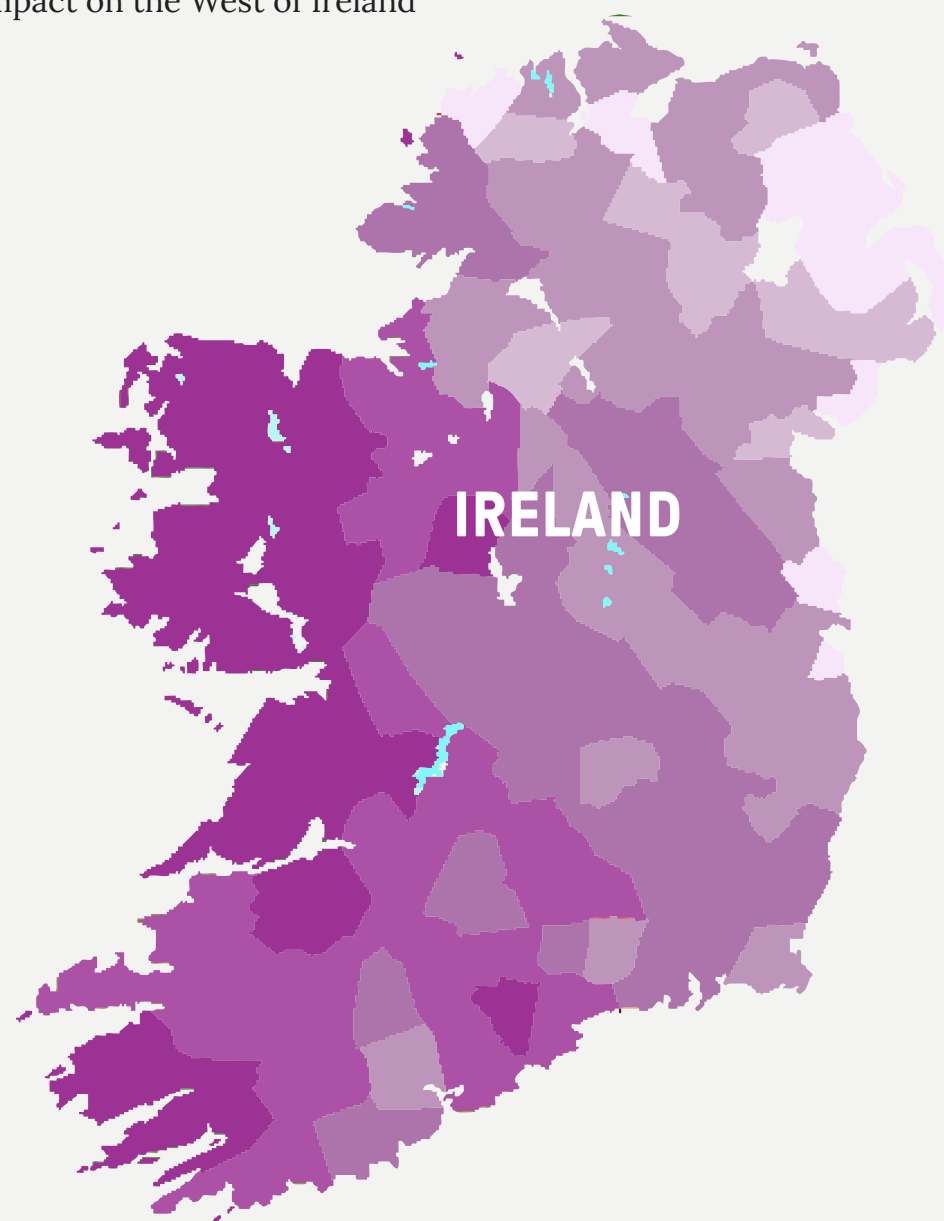
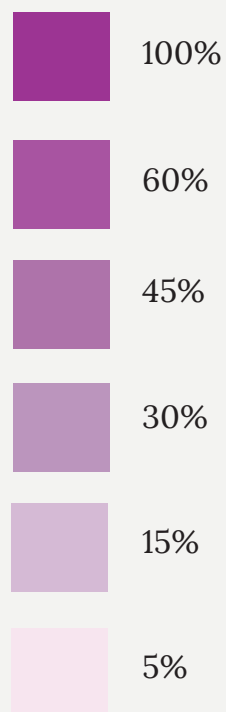
Where you live can be a significant factor in how you are affected by famine. During the Irish Famine (1845-1852), rural dwellers were more heavily affected by the failure of the potato crop – which was often effectively the key source of food for the small farms and communities in the West of the country. Over a million Irish people died in the famine and many more were forced to emigrate.



CASE STUDY

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

Percentage of people taking up rations in 1847 demonstrating the disproportionate impact on the West of Ireland



Children boarding an evacuation ship in the Hague, 1945
- Image Credit 4



More recently in the Dutch 'Hunger Winter' (1944-45) it was the more urban west of the country that was hardest hit. Due to the liberation of southern parts of the Netherlands in September 1944, food transportation from Germany was made more difficult. The national railway strike, an act of resistance called for by the Dutch government exiled in London, was followed by German food blockades which prevented food from reaching the cities in the west.



Dutch children in a soup kitchen
- Image Credit 5

As a result of the famine, Dutch children were evacuated from the west of the country to the north and east, where shortages were not as severe. The Interkerkelijk Bureau, an organisation in which Protestant and Catholic churches worked together, played a major role in the evacuation of around 40,000 children. But many families also had to rely on personal connections and access to transport to find better places for their children.





STATUS

Different types of citizens can also be impacted in different ways by famine. Refugees and displaced people are disproportionately affected by famine. These groups tend to have low status and very little influence and find themselves most at risk from food scarcity and its effects.



Refugees in Western Sahara, 2007 - Image Credit 6

HOW DOES THIS IMPACT TODAY?

In 2021 severe funding constraints in West Africa, where hunger had reached a record high in a decade, forced the World Food Programme (WFP) to significantly reduce rations for refugees living in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. WFP assists on average 500,000 refugees in Southern Africa annually.



"As global hunger soars way beyond the resources available to feed all the families who desperately need WFP's help, we are being forced to make the heartbreaking decision to cut food rations for refugees who rely on us for their survival," WFP Executive Director David Beasley argued. As he also stated, "Without urgent new funds to support refugees – one of the world's most vulnerable and forgotten groups of people – many facing starvation will be forced to pay with their lives."

<https://www.wfp.org/news/escalating-needs-rising-hunger-refugees-caught-eye-perfect-storm>



INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES



The different factors above help us to understand how different communities can be impacted differently by famine, but there can also be different impacts on a more individual level.

Human beings have different requirements for food and nutrition depending on age, gender, activity level etc.

Young children require high levels of nutrition to support their growth and development, physical labour requires more calories to provide energy, and men generally require more calories than women each day. Pregnant women also have a greater nutritional requirement as they nourish their unborn children as well as themselves. Malnutrition of pregnant women can affect both the child, and the mother – often some years later.

These factors are significant in determining how famines might impact on an individual level.



Macedonian Refugees, 2015 - Image Credit 7

DISCUSSION POINT

How might famine impact different individuals in different ways?

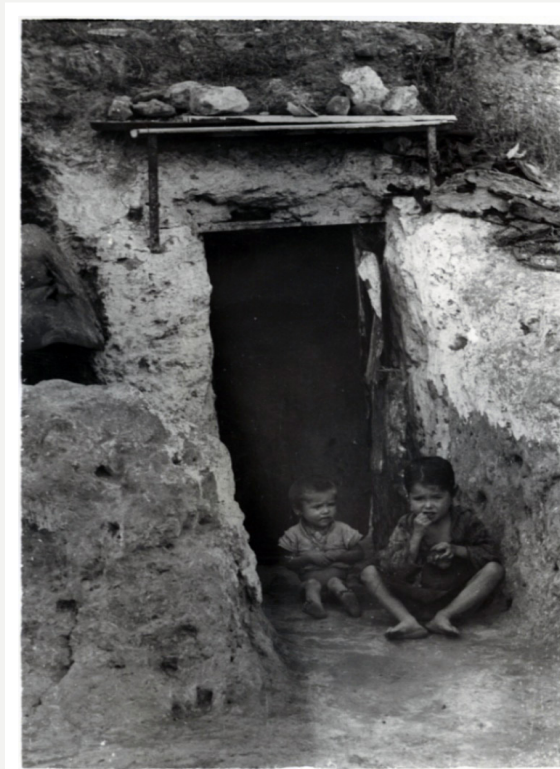


Rowan Gillespie's 'Ireland Park' famine memorial, Toronto
- Image Credit 8

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Children are disproportionately impacted by famines. Lack of food weakens the whole body and makes it less resistant to illness and infection, particularly so in children whose bodies and immunity are not fully developed.

Malnutrition affects both physical and cognitive development – meaning that children who have suffered from it do not just have physical health risks, but also a greater risk of poor educational performance, poor wages and ongoing poverty.



Children in the Spanish Hunger Years
- Image Credit 9



“People are not just dying due to a lack of food. Hunger means their weakened bodies cannot fight off diseases like diarrhoea, measles or malaria, so death rates are high. Children are particularly at risk and often die at double the rate of adults. And those who survive will face ill health for the rest of their lives.”

Abukar Mohamud, International Red Cross, Somalia 2022



Children in Yemen
- Image Credit 10

IMPACT ON WOMEN

Woman looking for water in Dry riverbed
- Image Credit 11



The Widow Connor and her dying Child - The Irish Famine

- Image Credit 12

Today, 60% of those suffering from food insecurity (a key risk factor in famine) are women. In many countries there is an accepted culture of women eating least and last in the family when food is scarce.

In addition in some cases and some cultures, girls may be married off at an early age by their families in exchange for food or money. This often means the end of the girl's education and increases their chance of remaining in poverty.



> IMPACT ON THE ELDERLY

Famine has repeatedly impacted more severely on the elderly than on younger adults throughout history. Elderly people may be more vulnerable to illness or more quickly affected by malnutrition due to their age, but there has also been a cultural tendency to give priority in access to food to young people and economically productive adults when supplies are scarce – those with their lives ahead of them and those who may be most useful in helping the society to survive the famine.



A man lies in bed with edema in his legs during the hunger winter, The Hague (1944-1945) - **Image Credit 13**

> IMPACT ON THE UNWELL AND DISABLED

People with illness and/or disability are also disproportionately impacted by the effects of famine.

People suffering from illness or disability are at a higher risk during famines for a range of reasons. Increased nutritional needs due to illness, limited access to resources, social and economic marginalisation, dependence on caregivers, worsening health conditions, and increased mortality risk all increase the vulnerability of this group.

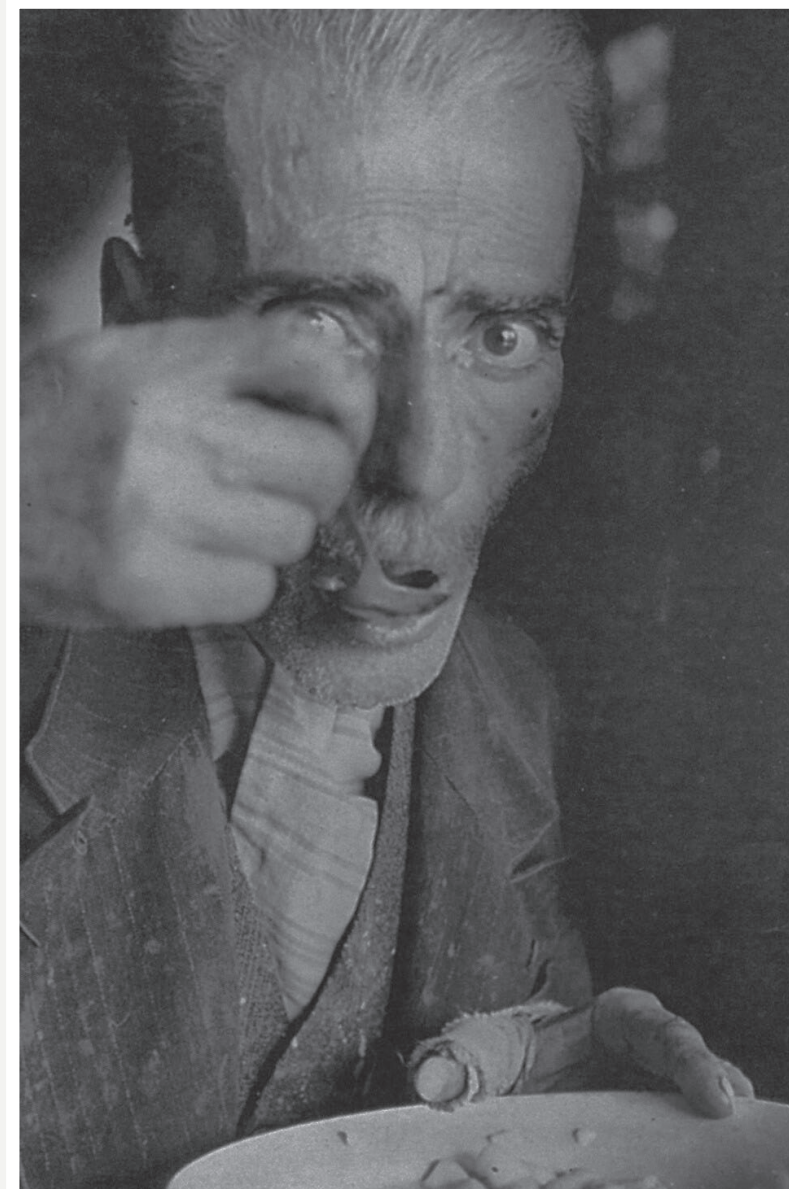
Addressing their needs requires specific support to ensure they receive adequate food, medical care, and social support during such crises.



CASE STUDY

THE GREEK FAMINE (1941-44)

The Greek Famine of 1941-1944 saw open acknowledgement that the elderly were not a priority when allocating precious supplies of food.



A Greek man at a soup kitchen - Athens 1942
- **Image Credit 14**



'the growing child, the pregnant woman and the heavily working manual labourer will become undernourished and vulnerable to infections and thus should be given priority in terms of food provision.'

(Anon as reported in a newspaper article August 1941, cited in Hionidou, 'If We Hadn't Left ... We Would Have All Died': Escaping Famine on the Greek Island of Chios, 1941-44, pdf p206)



CASE STUDY

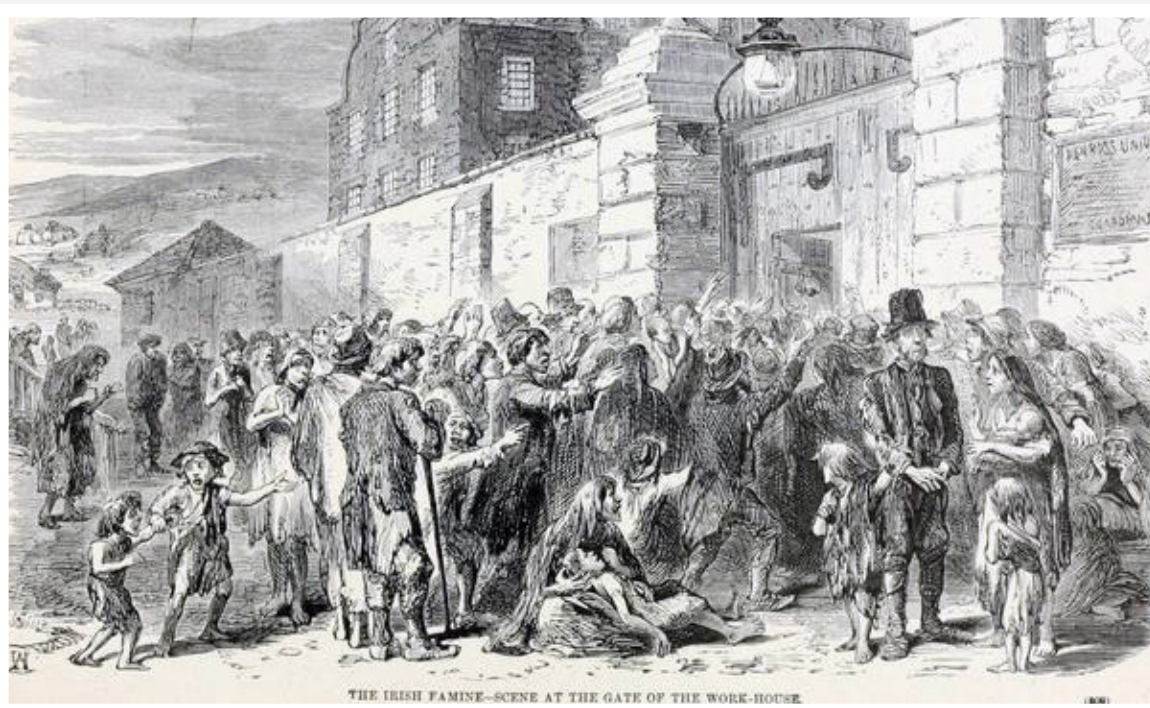
THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

During the Irish famine of 1845-52, many of the disabled and chronically ill were forced to rely on the workhouse system for survival. However, these institutions were overcrowded, poorly funded, and often lacked adequate food and medical care for the many starving people who also sought refuge there.



While there was room for about 93,000 people in workhouses across the country, there were approximately 120,000 inmates, 20,000 of whom were ill. The conditions in workhouses were harsh, and mortality rates among the sick and disabled were particularly high.

(Thomas Guinnane and Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Mortality in the North Dublin Union During the Famine')



- Image Credit 15



CONCLUSION

Throughout history, and right up to the present day, famines have had different impacts on different groups in society. Those that have the greatest access to power and resources are less likely to be seriously affected than those that do not.

On a more individual level, famine often impacts differently, with children, women, the elderly and the disabled at greatest risk of being most severely affected by famine.



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



DIGITAL TIMELINE

Have students create a digital timeline using a tool like Timetoast or Sutori, showcasing major famines throughout history and their varying impacts on different social groups.



ROLE-PLAY

Assign students different roles (e.g., wealthy landowner, poor farmer, government official) and have them act out a scenario during a famine, discussing how it affects each of them differently.



ONLINE QUIZ

Develop a quiz using Kahoot! or Quizizz to test students' understanding of how famine impacts different communities and individuals.



POSTER CREATION

Have students create informative posters highlighting how famine impacts various groups (children, women, elderly, etc.) differently.



DEBATE

Organise a classroom debate on the topic "Is famine an equal opportunity disaster?" with students arguing for and against the statement.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Nikolai Bokan, 1933

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/168

Image Credit 2

Unknown, 1941

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/76/Bundesarchiv_Bild_101I-163-0318-30%2C_Griechenland%2C_deutsche_Soldaten_in_Gesch%C3%A4ft.jpg

Image Credit 3

Unknown, 1933

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/204

Image Credit 4

Menno Huizinga, 1945

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/87

Image Credit 5

Menno Huizinga, 1945

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_famine_of_1944%E2%80%931945#/media/File:BC856_HUI-2050.jpg

Image Credit 6

Saharaiak, 2007

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Refugees#/media/File:Camellos_en_el_campamento_Dajla_-_Saharaiak.jpg

Image Credit 7

Dragan Tatic, 2015

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arbeitsbesuch_Mazedonien_\(20271947403\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arbeitsbesuch_Mazedonien_(20271947403).jpg)

Image Credit 8

Toronto Famine Memorial

<https://www.irishamericanmom.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Statue-of-a-pregnant-Irish-woman-at-Torontos-Famine-Memorial-Ireland-Park.jpg>

Image Credit 9

Unknown, 1943

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/122

Image Credit 10

Children in Yemen, 2013

https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image_/1401/01/13/1401011309541181325070624.jpg

Image Credit 11

DFID, 2011

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Digging_for_drinking_water_in_a_dry_riverbed_\(6220146368\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Digging_for_drinking_water_in_a_dry_riverbed_(6220146368).jpg)

Image Credit 12

Unknown, 1850

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/54

Image Credit 13

Menno Huizinga, 1945

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/sources/detail_image_view/67

Image Credit 14

Unknown, 1941

<https://www.oparlapipas.gr/2013/11/1941-1942.html>

Image Credit 15

John Clark Ridpath

<https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/st-jamess-hospital-dublins-history>



LESSON TWO: POWER, AGENCY & SOCIAL CLASS

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will enable students to understand how agencies of power and class can affect famine conditions. It will highlight the different hunger conditions faced by diverse communities across the world, allowing students to make a comparative study. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)
- » The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)
- » The Finnish Great Years of Hunger (1866-68)

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Understand how famine has impacted differently on different communities due to social conditions.
- ✓ Discuss the reasons why class and power can have an impact on famine.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Understand that famine may not always be caused by food scarcity.
- ✓ Understand how power, agency and class can influence the availability of food across diverse communities and individuals.



Irish landlord
begging for rent
- Image Credit 1



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- » [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- » [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- » [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- » [Scottish example of landlord evictions](#)
- » [Bread costing 15 a loaf in Greek, shows power dynamics of money](#)
- » [Starvation used as punishment in Auschwitz](#)
- » [British Blockade of Germany in WW 1](#)

INTRODUCTION

Famine is not simply about a lack of food. There are a number of factors which determine how a lack of food is experienced by different people across society. In Lesson One we explored how characteristics such as wealth, power, geography, gender and age can all affect how a famine is experienced.

In this lesson we will develop some of these ideas, with a focus on how power and social class are often key factors in how famine develops and impacts those affected.

'Power and social class' really refers to the level of influence and agency that a group or community may have - the extent to which it is able to control its own direction, and the extent to which it may have to rely on the direction of other people or communities.

With regard to famine, this may mean the level of control that a community has over access to food - either through the ability to buy it, to produce it, to transport it or to store it. The less control you have over these factors, the more vulnerable you are to food scarcity and famine.

DISCUSSION POINT

Who do you think is likely to suffer most in society in times of famine?





THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)



An ejection in Ireland (A Tear and Prayer for Erin) - Image Credit 2

In the case of the Irish Famine, social class was a key factor, with the landlord system a key element in controlling access to food and security.

Landlords had owned most of the land in Ireland since the English invasions of the seventeenth century, with many Irish people living as tenant farmers by the time of the famine, paying rent to landlords for their homes and land. Ongoing poverty meant that many tenants were already in debt to their landlords by the time the famine came in the 1840s and were at constant risk of eviction from their homes and land.

This gave landlords some control over the supply of what food was available for those on their lands, and any food that was provided from elsewhere was likely to be distributed largely under their approval. If you were in debt to your landlord then you were often less likely to be able to access food.

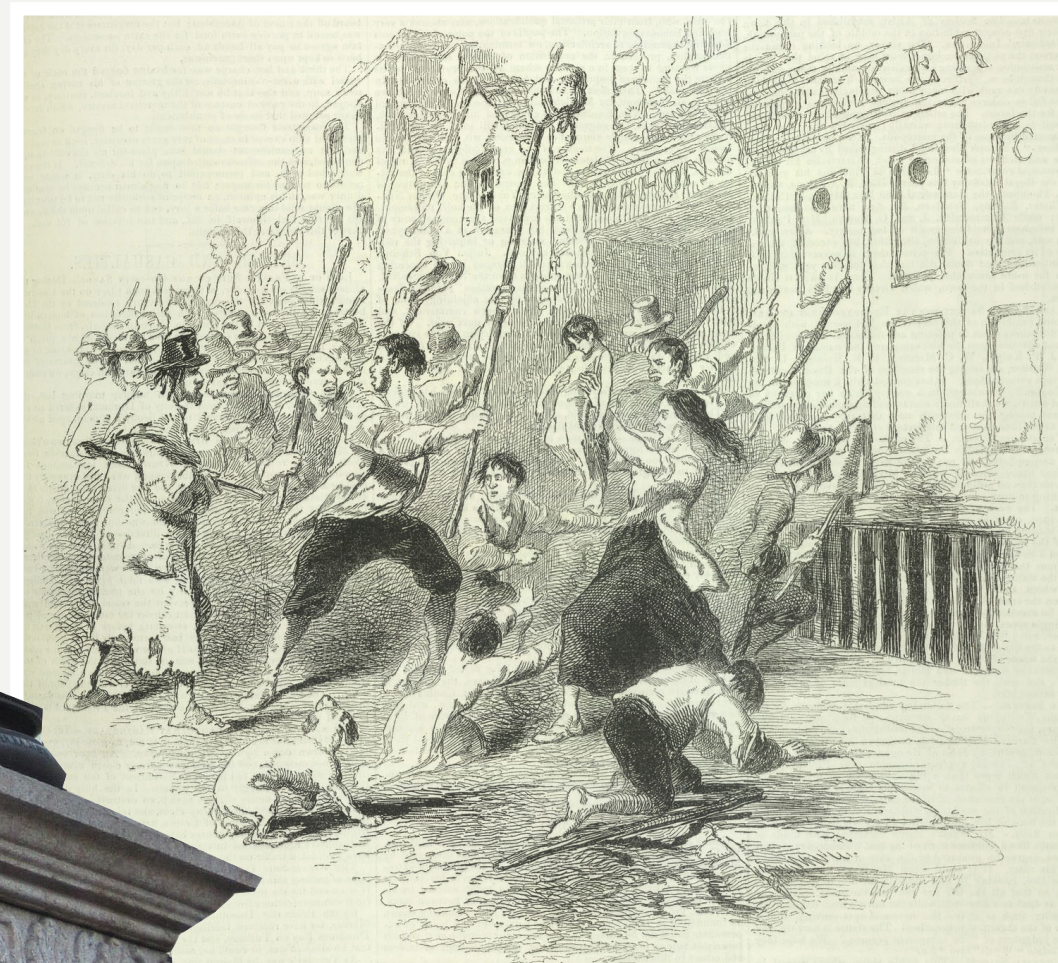


VISCOUNT PALMERSTON.

Additionally, arrears in the payment of rent meant that many tenant farmers were evicted from their homes by order of their landlords. As a result, families often faced both hunger and homelessness.

Over a million people died in the famine, and many more emigrated to escape, while several landlords were murdered by those angered at their role in the death of so many of their tenants.

Not all landlords were so cruel towards their tenants; there were also many who went out of their way to provide food and relief for the people on their estate, even if they incurred high debts for this.



Food riot outside bakery in Dungarvan - Image Credit 3

A statue of Lord Palmerston in London - he evicted over 2000 families on his estate in Ireland - Image Credit 4

FAMINE AS A LEVER OF POWER

The worst famines of the 20th century, including the deadliest famine in China (1959–1961) with an estimated 30 million victims, happened under totalitarian rule. These regimes often have total control over their population, enforce harsh rules, suppress people's freedom, engage in corrupt practices, isolate themselves internationally, and operate without transparency – all factors which may make a famine more likely and more severe.

The dynamic of power and social class in famine has further implications that go beyond the question of simply who suffers the most. The power dynamic also means that famine can be used as a tool by the wealthy and powerful to control or punish the poor, or those who are seen as enemies by the State.



8000000 Victims of Hunger in Ukraine
– Image Credit 5



Victims of Hunger in Ukraine
– Image Credit 7

CASE STUDY

THE UKRAINIAN HOLODOMOR (1932-33)

The Holodomor, the Ukrainian Famine of 1932–33, saw Stalin's Soviet Regime effectively starve millions of Ukrainians for refusing to comply with the Soviet model of collectivised farming. In this way, Stalin's power over food and access to food for Ukrainians was used to punish those who did not do what the Soviet leadership was demanding. Almost four million Ukrainians died in the famine. There has been ongoing debate about whether the famine should be seen as Stalin's deliberate attempt to exterminate the Ukrainian people. Today, the Holodomor is recognised as a genocide by many countries, including Ukraine, Canada, and the US, as well as the European Parliament.



In times of famine, food can be used by the powerful to reward or punish those who have no control over access to it and offers a powerful means of ensuring compliance.

We will keep out the Kulaks –
propaganda poster
– Image Credit 6

“

“In the late 1920s, as it pursued its policy of forced collectivization of agriculture, the Soviet regime launched a campaign against the most successful peasant farmers. The authorities labeled them “kulaks” and demonized and dehumanized them as parasites -- class enemies who needed to be wiped off the face of the earth. Over time, the label “kulak” could be used to persecute anyone suspected of anti-Soviet attitudes. Some half a million so-called kulaks and their families were deported from Ukraine to labor camps, many dying along the way. Others were simply executed.”

Marta Baziuk, Holodomor Research and Education Consortium

DISCUSSION POINT

How might the historic experience of the Holodomor shape Ukrainian attitudes to Russia today?

FAMINE AS A REINFORCER OF INEQUALITY

Famine can also have the effect of reinforcing inequality and prejudice against the poor and the powerless.

Famine is very often about access to food, rather than the general availability of food in itself. This can mean that those who are not as badly impacted by the famine, and those who are not affected at all, have often felt a sense of superiority to those who are suffering.

This perception of superiority has been evidenced in many cases in characterisations of those suffering from famine as being lazy or undeserving, and effectively responsible for the devastating situations in which they find themselves.

These responses can help to reinforce divisions within a society and can be used as a tool by ruling elites to ensure disunity between those that they govern.

CASE STUDY

THE IRISH AND FINNISH FAMINES



In the Irish Famine there were persistent attempts to demonise the victims of the famine as being in some way responsible for their own fate because of their own poverty, laziness, or even their reliance on the potato as a main foodstuff. The Irish were often depicted as primitive and even monkey-like in the cartoons of the English magazine Punch, stereotypes that were rooted in British colonial ideologies.



Punch Magazine
Cartoons 19th
Century
- Image Credit 8/9



In Finland's Great Famine of 1856-68 many of the victims were portrayed as vagrants and beggars by the Finnish ruling classes, with Robert Wilhelm Ekman's 'Beggar Family on the Road' becoming an iconic stereotype of the suffering poor, who were depicted as homeless and reliant on others to help them. The helplessness of many of the starving in rural areas was an eyesore to the Finnish government under J.V. Snellman, which tried to promote self-reliance and a market-driven economy.

Beggar family on the road
- Image Credit 10

DISCUSSION POINT

Why might those the powerful and influential seek to blame victims of famine for their own suffering?

CONCLUSION

Class and power can be significant factors in famine, with the ruling classes able to exploit food shortages as a tool to control, reward and punish those with less power and influence.

Because famine is usually not about an absolute lack of food, those with control are often able to offer some access to food to those that they wish to, and this can give opportunities to increase their control and power within that society, nation or region.



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



SOCIAL MEDIA SIMULATION

Have students create mock social media profiles for historical figures from different social classes during a famine, posting updates about their experiences.



FAMINE SIMULATION GAME

Create a classroom-wide simulation where students are assigned different social classes and must navigate a famine scenario, making decisions based on their status.



POLITICAL CARTOON ANALYSIS

Provide students with historical political cartoons related to famines and have them analyse how power and class are depicted.



DIGITAL INFOGRAPHIC

Use tools like Canva or Piktochart to have students create infographics explaining the relationship between power, social class, and famine.



“POWER PYRAMID” ACTIVITY

Have students create a visual representation of social classes during a famine, discussing how each level might be affected differently.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

John Gordon Thomson, 1880
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Irish_landlord_begging_for_rent.jpg#/media/File:Irish_landlord_begging_for_rent.jpg

Image Credit 2

Robert George Kelly, 1848
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/53

Image Credit 3

British Library, 1846
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishlibrary/12459233983>

Image Credit 4

Prioryman, 2015
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue_of_Lord_Palmerston,_Parliament_Square#/media/File:Palmerston_statue_Parliament_Square.jpg

Image Credit 5

Ukrainian Youth Union, 1948
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/218

Image Credit 6

Unknown, 1930
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/188

Image Credit 7

Zofia Nalepińska-Bojczuk, 1935
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holodomor#/media/File:Famine_in_Ukraine.jpg

Image Credit 8

John Tennial, 1882
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Punch_Anti-Irish_propaganda_\(1882\)_Irish_Frankenstein.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Punch_Anti-Irish_propaganda_(1882)_Irish_Frankenstein.jpg)

Image Credit 9

William Newman, 1845
<https://viewsofthefamine.wordpress.com/punch/the-real-potato-blight-of-ireland/>

Image Credit 10

Robert Wilhelm Ekman, 1860
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/187

LESSON THREE: RESPONSIBILITY

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore the complexity behind assigning responsibility for famine. Through exploring diverse case studies, students will understand how accountability for famine has been assigned through history and gain an insight into the difficulties in doing so. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » The Finnish Hunger Years (1866-68)
- » The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)
- » The Greek Famine (1941-44)

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Identify and discuss common factors in accountability for famine histories across different countries.
- ✓ Understand the reasons for those affected by famine to seek accountability for their situation.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Be able to explain the complexities in assigning responsibility for famine.
- ✓ Describe how different societies have found this process difficult.



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- » [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
 - » [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
 - » [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)
- Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:
- » [Famine in Czechoslovakia and Norway](#)
 - » [Children's book from Spain from after the Francoist War](#)



Statue of Stalin
- Image Credit 1

INTRODUCTION

Because famine can cause such devastation at a large scale, figuring out who is to blame for the crisis can be highly contentious.

As we have seen, famine is usually centred around access to food, rather than an absolute shortage of food in any given country or region. If a crop fails, a war breaks out, or a market collapses then it can be potentially devastating to the food supply, but it is the response to the issue that determines whether or not that devastation will actually materialise.

For this reason, famine is often highly politicised and deciding who is ultimately responsible for a famine can become very complicated, with many different parties blaming each other for key elements of the situation.



THE FINNISH HUNGER YEARS (1866-68)



Illustrated wooden memorials placed on the "Hunger Moor" / "Isthmus of the Sixteen", Finland
- Image Credit 2

In 1867, the latest in a line of crop failures plunged much of Finland into famine. The crop failure added to financial pressures that many Finnish peasants were enduring and led to a period of devastation that claimed almost 300,000 lives (around 8.5% of the total Finnish population).

Unlike many other famines of the time, Finland's could not be blamed on a colonial or external Government policy – Finland had been autonomous and self-governing for over fifty years prior to the famine, although it was a Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire.

With no external forces to be blamed, the Finnish elites placed the primary responsibility for the famine onto nature and the weather, and the secondary responsibility onto the general helplessness of the rural peasant class – who they saw as unable to look after themselves effectively and unable to prevent themselves from becoming victims of famine.

The role of the government in seeking to reduce the effects of weather and crop failure was sidelined in the discussion of causes of the famine, with the efforts made to feed the poor instead highlighted, and the Finnish famine was afterwards downplayed in the narratives of the country's national history.

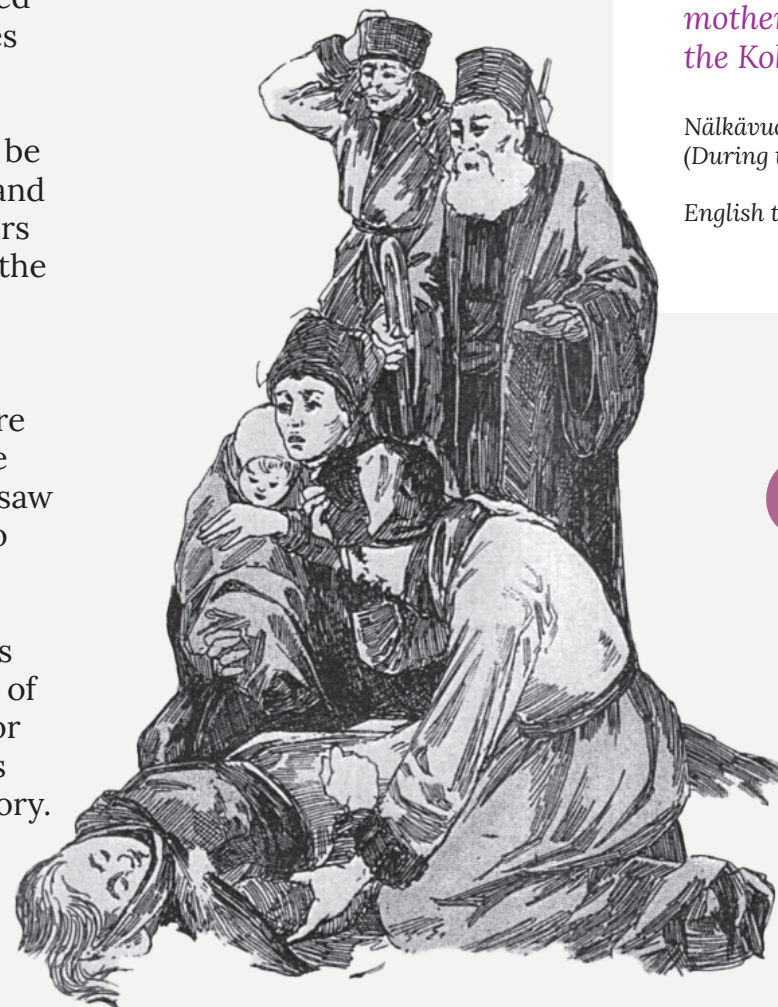


Illustration of Finnish Famine
- Image Credit 3

“

“You see, at mid-winter the master of Kohiseva House came to inform Perttu that there was no longer any surplus in the charity coffers to give to anyone in Kuohatti. The guardian of the poor-law board had announced at church that the state could not afford to spend money on just nothing, and that the people of Kuohatti had better work.” He had added: “They’re complaining for no reason. Kuohatti has good lands, especially the slash and burn-lands.”

“That’s how it is, poor Perttu,” pondered Kohiseva: “People in my own village are beginning to have nothing to give either. That’s how it is: there is suffering to be felt not only by you, but for us as well.”

“But a Karelian can take suffering,” thought Perttu whilst tossing the last handful of bark-flour into his dough, which after being baked did not seem to be holding together, as it held hardly a grain of rye to bind it. After a while he added: “If only one would dare to take some pine bark from the crown forests, or if they were even given a couple of cups of rye, there would be no talk of having nothing for a long time, and maybe after seeing some food the workforce would take action so that some work could actually be done.”

Kohiseva promised to have his wife bake as much hay-bread as possible, while they themselves still had hay with which to bake it. “And, of course, you can make do with bark-bread as well for now, as long as you have a sack at hand,” he added as he left.

Grateful for the promised help, Perttu shook Kohiseva’s hand much harder than usual and Tuomas, with his eyes glistening brightly with joy, whispered into his mother’s ear: “You’ll be healthy in no time now that we’re getting hay-bread from the Kohisevas.”

Nälkävuonna: karjalainen kertomus
(During the Year of Hunger (A Karelian Tale))

English translation by Andrew G. Newby.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why might the governing elites in Finland seek to blame victims of the famine for their fate?

THE GREEK FAMINE (1941-44)

The Greek Famine was the result of Germany and its Axis powers occupying the country as part of their war efforts.

The occupation had two clear impacts on the famine that followed. Germany and the Axis powers required food and resources to support their war effort and troops outside of Greece. This meant that Greek food and resources were seized and diverted outside of the country to feed the Axis armies and populations.

In addition to this, the Allied powers implemented a blockade of the country to prevent food and supplies being requisitioned by the occupying Axis leadership. This meant that critical supplies of food and relief were unable to reach the Greek people. Up to 300,000 Greeks then perished in the famine, despite the emergence of a 'black market' for food and essential provisions.

As the famine wrought havoc on Greece, the Allies blamed the Germans for their plundering of the nation's food supplies, but significant pressure came onto the Allies, with the blockade being blamed by the Axis powers, and by the Vatican, for the devastation and loss of life in the famine. Aid agencies expressed frustration that they were unable to deliver support due to the blockade.

Regardless of where the blame for the famine lay, the Allies lifted the blockade in 1942 and relief was rapidly felt in Greece, with the famine effectively ended.

Route 1. When I left the car, he said he was sorry he couldn't take me any farther."

Famine in Athens Kills 2,000 in Day; Bread \$15 a Loaf

By the Associated Press.

BERN, Switzerland, Jan. 28. —Famine conditions in Greece are so acute that 2,000 persons died in Athens alone in a single day and bread sells for \$15 a loaf, the Journal de Geneve reported today.

The paper quoted an anonymous letter dated December 9, 1941, from a writer in Greece as the source of its information.

"People of the streets all are like skeletons and on every corner people are lying down," the letter said. "The winter is especially intense and there is no wood."

"Only the richest can afford available food, with bread selling at \$15 a loaf."

Sum Japanese raid today west coast to two ship it was ann Some ca as a result region of Island betw Guinea.

"There i enemy air. Indies co were dropp places cau age. Here east of Bor and machi Reportin Papen, Bor Strait, the "there is r

News article about mortality, winter and inflation in Athens during the Axis occupation in WWII
- Image Credit 4



Nazis at the Parthenon in Athens
- Image Credit 5

DISCUSSION POINT

How does the Greek Famine show us that trying to apportion blame for famine can be complicated and too simplistic an approach?

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

Landlord addresses tenants in Monaghan
- Image Credit 6



The Irish Famine of the nineteenth century was principally caused by the failure of the potato crop over successive years. The blight that afflicted the potato meant that the principal source of food and nutrition for the majority of the Irish population was in short supply and led to a catastrophic famine that claimed almost a million lives.

However, whilst the failure of the potato crop may have triggered the famine, much of the blame for its severity and impact has been placed upon Ireland's colonial relationship with England.

Irish land was very often owned by British or Anglo-Irish Landlords and for many years had been exporting corn, meat and other foodstuffs to Great Britain to help feed the population there. When the famine began these exports continued and the British government came to adopt a laissez-faire (hands off) approach to helping Ireland – insisting that landlords were still paid rents. This policy was compounded by a common view among the British ruling classes that high Catholic birth-rates and the supposedly lazy nature of the Irish people made them responsible for their own fate in the famine.

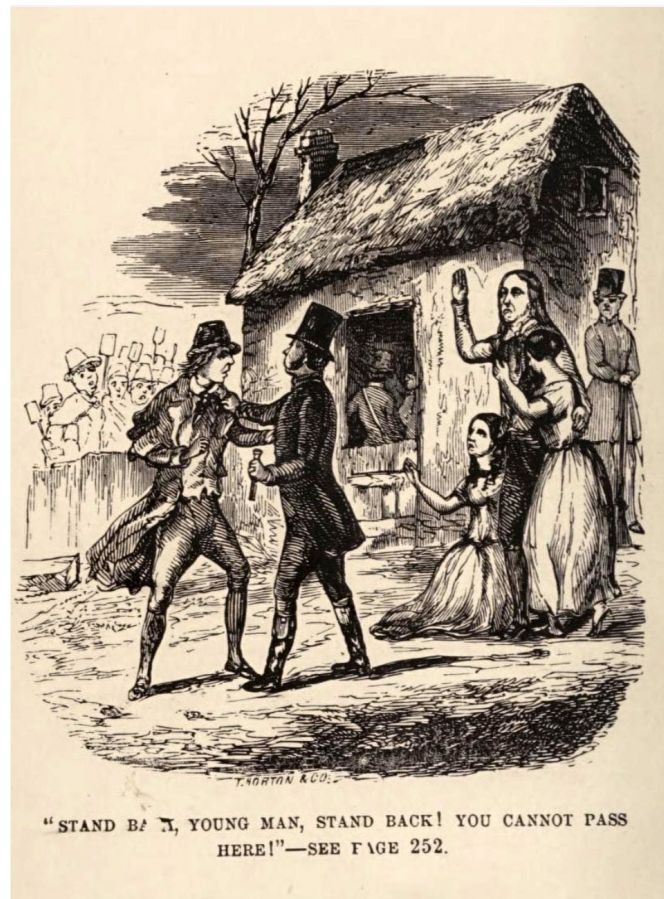
This notion that the British made the Irish famine worse became central to the Irish national historical narrative, and stories that corn was shipped out of Ireland while the Irish were starving often feature in stories about the catastrophe.



Irish famine imagery
- Image Credit 7

This framing of the Great Famine as the result of deliberate policies by the British to decrease Ireland's population became more commonplace due to the writings of Irish nationalist John Mitchel (1815–1875), such as *Jail Journal* (1854). Exiled from his country for his involvement in the Young Ireland rebellion of 1848, Mitchel blamed the British for the Famine as a way to plead for Home Rule (Irish independence).

This narrative of British guilt still occupies a key place in the Irish psyche and identity today.



Landlordism depicted in the Irish Famine
- Image Credit 8

DISCUSSION POINT

What does the Irish Famine teach us about how a tragedy such as a famine can be used to shape the national identity?

TASK

Find at least three examples of how both the Irish and Finnish Famines have been commemorated. What are the similarities and differences in how they have been treated? What might this tell us about how they have been remembered in national history?

Create a poster commemorating the Greek Famine from an Axis powers sympathisers viewpoint, and one from an Allied viewpoint. What message is each one seeking to convey?

OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS

DIGITAL ACTIVITIES

DIGITAL CASE STUDY

Create a series of pen pics of famine protagonists, where students can explore different perspectives on who's responsible for a specific famine.

ONLINE DEBATE FORUM

Set up a moderated online forum where students can discuss and debate responsibility for famines in different historical contexts.

VIDEO ESSAY

Have students create short video essays, presenting their views on famine responsibility.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

MOCK TRIAL

Organize a classroom “trial” where different groups or individuals are accused of causing or exacerbating a famine, with students acting as prosecutors, defense attorneys, and jury.

HISTORICAL PRESS CONFERENCE

Have students role-play as historical figures holding a press conference about a famine, answering questions about their role and responsibilities.





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Szedder László, 2007
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Mme Fernande De Lysle, 1897
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Evening Star, 1942
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GFA 1941
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J Sadlier, 1852
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Credits

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